



Eric Venturini, Executive Director

Testimony in Support LD 866. An Act Concerning Advanced Refrigeration Technology.

Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker, and esteemed members of the Committee on the Environment and Natural Resources, my name is Eric Venturini and I am the Executive Director of the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine.

The Wild Blueberry Commission works on behalf of Maine's 485¹ wild blueberry farmers and businesses who grow wild blueberries on approximately 40,000² acres across the state. Last year we produced over 100 million pounds of Maine wild blueberries. Wild blueberry Commission of Maine is dedicated to conserving and promoting the prosperity and welfare of this State and of the wild blueberry industry of this State by fostering research and extension programs, by supporting the development of promotional opportunities and other activities related to the wild blueberry industry.

Unlike our major competitor, cultivated or ordinary blueberries, Maine's wild blueberries are small and wild. Where ordinary blueberries are bred to increase things like shelf-life, wild blueberries are not bred, and therefore have a short shelf life in their fresh form. Because of their short shelf life, we freeze approximately 98% of the crop each year. These Individual Quick Frozen (IQF) berries, and another form called, fresh-frozen, are stored in commercial freezers here in Maine that range in size small walk-in freezers to larger facilities that can store tens of millions of pounds.

Like many other agricultural sectors in Maine, we are acutely aware of the impacts of climate change. In 2020 we lost an estimated 45% of our crop to drought and recent research shows that wild blueberry fields are warming more quickly than the rest of the state.³ Our Commission identifies as one of our 2022 priorities, "Support research and innovation that aids climate change adaptation and reduces supply inconsistencies," we identified barriers to prosperity that include, "Climate change and its

¹ National Agricultural Statistics Service. 2017. Berries: 2017.

https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_2_County_Level/Maine/st23_2_0033_0033.pdf

² Based on 2019 and 2020 harvested acreage (appx. half of total acreage in any given year).

<https://extension.umaine.edu/blueberries/factsheets/statistics-2/crop-production-statistics-2019/>

³ Tasnim, R., F. Drummond, and Y.-J. Zhang. 2021. Climate Change Patterns of Wild Blueberry Fields in Downeast, Maine over the Past 40 Years. *Water*, 13(5): [10.3390/w13050594](https://doi.org/10.3390/w13050594).



influence on the inconsistency of supply,” and we have identified as a long-term priority objective to, “address climate change issues.” In short, our industry is experiencing the challenges of climate change and is seeking ways to adapt.

Lyford’s amendment adds specificity to the use of the Greenhouse Gas Initiative Trust Fund. Per the statute, this trust fund may be used to help reduce energy consumption, increase efficiency, or reduce greenhouse gas emissions at commercial or industrial facilities. Lyford’s amendment specifies that such measures can include assistance with replacing industrial refrigeration products or equipment that have high global warming potential with those that have reduced global warming potential. This bill would help Maine’s wild blueberry producers reduce greenhouse gas emissions by providing assistance to retrofit existing refrigeration technology with clean, more energy efficient refrigeration technology.

On behalf of the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine I urge you to vote Ought To Pass. Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony.

